

Church of Ireland

The House of Bishops

PROTOCOL FOR RECEIVING MINISTERS OF OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES WHO HAVE NOT BEEN EPISCOPALLY ORDAINED

Introduction

This protocol sets out the process for receiving into the ministry of the Church of Ireland, Ministers who have served in other Christian churches (those included on the list approved by the House of Bishops) but have not been episcopally ordained.

The Process

The process involves four stages: (1) assessment by the diocesan bishop; (2) the House of Bishops; (3) Training; and (4) Episcopal Ordination.

The process may vary, depending, for example, on the following:

- whether the applicant has recently been in active ministry in another Christian church;
- whether s/he has, for a significant period, been worshipping in the Church of Ireland, and active in the parish.

It is important, and will be required, that applicants have a real sense of the parochial reality and worshipping life of the Church of Ireland before they are permitted to proceed.

Applicants who are still 'active' in ministry of the other church are required to ensure, not least for the sake of ecumenical courtesy, that they deal fully and transparently with their own ecclesiastical authorities. Proceeding with undue haste from the ministry of one church to another is not permitted.

Stage 1: Assessment by the diocesan bishop

At local level, the process may vary from diocese to diocese. It will, however, include the following:

- 1.1 In the first instance, an enquirer or applicant should make contact directly or indirectly with the bishop of the diocese in which he or she resides.
- 1.2 The applicant should supply a full C.V.
- 1.3 The applicant should supply the names of at least four referees:
 - 1.3.1 Two of these should, if at all possible, be ministers of the church in which the applicant has formerly served;
 - 1.3.2 One should be a layperson who has observed the ministry of the applicant in his or her former situation.
 - 1.3.3 One should be a priest of the Church of Ireland – usually the applicant's rector – who has come to know the applicant well.
 - 1.3.4 It may also be appropriate to seek references from lay member(s) of the Church of Ireland who know the applicant.

- 1.4 The applicant will complete an application form, and also provide a written summary of his or her reasons for seeking to minister in the Church of Ireland.
- 1.5 The bishop will seek written references from each referee and may wish, with the applicant's consent, to follow them up as appropriate.
- 1.6 The bishop (with, as necessary, others appointed by him or her) carries out in-depth interviews concerning:
 - 1.6.1 Doctrine and spirituality;
 - 1.6.2 Attitude to authority and discipline which may include issues touching personal relationships (for example, if the applicant intends to marry in the context of leaving their former ministry);
 - 1.6.3 The Book of Common Prayer and Ordinal, and the contents of the latter relating especially to Holy Scripture;
 - 1.6.4 Familiarity with the Church of Ireland, and of wider Anglicanism; and
 - 1.6.5 Overall motivation for seeking to minister in the Church of Ireland.
- 1.7 The applicant will be required to undertake a psychological assessment with such a professional as the bishop shall designate. It is especially important that the bishop is assured, if necessary through professional psychological guidance, that the applicant has the necessary quality of adaptability to work fruitfully in the context of a different ecclesiastical culture and discipline.
- 1.8 The bishop may determine whether further advice is necessary, such as medical or academic assessment.
- 1.9 If the bishop decides to proceed further, s/he should then refer the application to the House of Bishops with written and verbal reports and a recommendation, together with the completed application papers from the applicant.
- 1.10 Before the matter proceeds to the House of Bishops evidence of Confirmation will also be required.
- 1.11 At the appropriate stages an applicant is required to undergo the Garda vetting or AccessNI vetting process (as appropriate), and also to undertake the Safeguarding Trust (Church of Ireland Child Protection) training programme.

Stage 2: The House of Bishops

- 2.1 If the House of Bishops decides, in principle, to support an application, then two bishops will be appointed (other than the applicant's diocesan bishop) and one other person – often the Director of the Theological Institute – to serve as an assessment panel.
- 2.2 The panel may meet the applicant as a single group, or the non-episcopal member may interview him alone. An experienced layperson may be added to the panel.
 - 2.3.1 The panel will be supplied with all documentation in the possession of the diocesan bishop and the House of Bishops concerning the application.
 - 2.3.2 The assessment panel will interview the candidate.

- 2.3.3 The assessment panel may request further professional assessment.
- 2.3.4 The outcome of the psychological assessment previously undertaken shall be available to the panel or, alternatively, a further psychological assessment may be requested.
- 2.3.5 The assessment panel will make a written report to the House of Bishops and, if this is positive, it should include recommendations as to training requirements.

Stage 3: Training

- 3.1 The content of the training will be agreed between the applicant's bishop and the Director of the Theological Institute in the light of the recommendation in (2.3.5) above, and in the form of an individual Study Agreement. It is recognised that the content and standards of theological training vary greatly according to the church from which the applicant comes.
- 3.2 Training should usually last a residential academic year, or its equivalent in non-residential/modular terms. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary to recommend that the applicant undertake the full normal training of a Church of Ireland ordinand.
- 3.3 The necessary parish placement during training should be handled sensitively. It should recognise that the applicant has already had considerable experience in ministry while also making clear that he or she is in preparation for Episcopal ordination. It is particularly important that there be adequate training during this period in the liturgy and worship of the Church of Ireland. The placement should offer opportunities to attend a rich variety of parochial worship, to accompany an incumbent in his/her duties and to sit in on as many aspects of parish life as possible.
- 3.4 However, particularly if the applicant has only recently ceased to minister in his or her own church the period of training should be regarded as creating a definite break between the exercise of ministry in one context and its resumption in another. Such a break is of very considerable psychological and spiritual importance. The House of Bishops may also recommend that the period of training be accompanied by one-to-one mentoring with a person of appropriate experience, such as a retired bishop.

Stage 4: Ordination

- 4.1 While the Episcopal ordination of an applicant in this situation as both deacon and priest should be essentially identical to any other ordination, it is appropriate that their previous ministry and its fruits are acknowledged sensitively and gratefully in the course of the service. The manner in which this is done will vary according to the nature of the ecumenical relationship between the Church of Ireland and their former church.
- 4.2 The new deacon is not expected to serve in an internship; he or she may proceed directly to a curacy following ordination to the diaconate.
- 4.4 Following ordination to the priesthood and licensing, the new priest should normally – if serving in a full-time stipendiary capacity – serve as a curate-assistant for at least two further years. If the ministry is other than full-time, the diocesan bishop should ensure there is an equivalent and adequate period of supervised ministry under a training incumbent before the priest is considered for institution to an incumbency or an equivalent area of personal responsibility.

- 4.5 Upon completion of training, the candidate deacon may, in the first instance, be offered an appropriate curacy by his or her own diocesan bishop. The diocesan bishop has no obligation to provide such a curacy.

Where no such curacy is available, or when, following consideration of the diocesan bishop's offer and by mutual agreement, the candidate deacon turns down the offer of the curacy initially offered, he or she shall enter the curacy allocation process which takes place upon completion of training.

The House of Bishops retains oversight of whether either of these options is the most prudent course of action, or whether the candidate deacon concerned should seek a curacy in the same manner as any candidate deacon seeking a title in the Church of Ireland.

**House of Bishops of the Church of Ireland
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